



Seminar on Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education

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L'Institut Roeher Institute

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Overview

On March 13, 2003, The Roeher Institute and the University of Calgary co-hosted a consultation on teacher preparation for inclusive education. Key themes explored in the consultation were:

- present state of teacher preparedness to address diversity in the regular classroom;
- arrangements to foster more effective inclusive practice in the regular classroom; and
- engaging partners to move forward an inclusive education agenda.

Participants at the consultation were:

Alberta

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Lorraine Stewart, Alberta Learning

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Manitoba

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Saskatchewan

Wanda Lyons, Acting Director, Special Education Unit, Department of Learning, SK

Gloria Mahussier, Board Member, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living

Faith Bodnar, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living

British Columbia

Claudia Semaniuk, Chair, BCACL Board & Consultant, Surrey School Board

Nancy Hoyano, Education Committee, BCACL & works with Educational Assistants

Charlie Naylor, Researcher, BC Teacher's Federation

CACL

Michael Bach, Executive Vice President

Zuhy Sayeed, Vice President, CACL and Co-Chair, Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education

Gordon Porter, Co-Chair, Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education

Denise Silverstone

The Roeher Institute
Cameron Crawford, President

Cameron Crawford and Anne Hughson co-facilitated the consultation.

Key themes, issues and directions that emerged from the consultation are as follows.

I. Environmental scan: present state of teacher preparedness to address diversity in the regular classroom

A. Manitoba

Teacher preparation in Manitoba is a two-year, post-degree program. Students take 6 credit hours on educational psychology, which includes a focus on how to modify the curriculum and other measures for a diversity of learners. The challenge is to safeguard this course work because it gets put in and taken out of the teacher-preparation program; there is pressure for future teachers to learn the curriculum instead of perceived "add-ons" like educational psychology.

The Special Education Certificate program (i.e., post-Bachelor of Education) is more or less coherent and focuses on adaptations, etc, rather than taking a categorical approach that focuses on specific disabilities. The challenge, here, is that the Special Education Certificate is not required by the province, so people working with regular educators may not have this background.

A further challenge is to ensure that a focus on inclusion is maintained in regular education preparation. Attitudes of teacher candidates need to be addressed -- many don't want to teach "those students". Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' exposure to students with diverse learning needs is problematic and limited because the students are in separate arrangements. Candidates are not encouraged to establish contact.

Professional/academic freedom is more of a problem at the post-graduate level. As the province only has generic special education programs it is difficult to know where to go for specialized knowledge.

The professional development approach is "shot gun" in the sense that it is driven by the interests of those who teach the courses and is provided on a cost-recovery basis.

In rural areas there are problems for graduates to get back to university to take specialized programs.

There is no requirement that teachers to go back to university for upgrading.

B. British Columbia

Dramatic changes have taken place in British Columbia, recently. Progress towards inclusive education is being reversed. Cuts in the school system are disproportionately affecting special education and English as a Second Language (ESL). Specialist support teachers now have to cover learning assistance, ESL and a range of other issues, but don't necessarily have the knowledge/expertise needed to do this.

Societal division is emerging between those who see diversity as something positive and those who see it as something negative.

Regular education teachers are beginning to resent the pulling of supports from the classroom. The gap is growing between the classroom teacher and specialist support teacher. Regular teachers are unwilling to go to Individual Education Plan (IEP) and other meetings if it won't make any positive difference in the classroom. The BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) is gathering data on the issue.¹

Many people are now disillusioned. Basic philosophical support for inclusion is strong, but teachers are saying "I just can't do it all alone". Class size has increased from about 28 to 35. There are growing numbers of children with special needs in "soft science" programs at the secondary school level. These courses were designed to accommodate more students with special needs, but are becoming ghettos; young people are being dumped into these classes.

The demographics of educators are such that lots are close to retirement. These people are good as a resource, but there is a need to target younger teachers. Seasoned older teachers can be used as mentors/resources for younger ones.

There is a need to offer courses that will help teachers to deal with what they're already doing, instead of providing professional development courses that are add-ons.

Fragmentation of Ministry and District support for professional development is making teachers desperate for information. Itinerant teachers are not as available to provide even very basic information for teachers.

The needs of classroom teachers are pivotal. Everything is being dumped, there, and well-trained specialist support teachers are being wiped out.

People are moving into the specialist teacher role with very little background. They move on to other positions once their preferred job postings become vacant. In some cases they become department heads, but don't have the expertise needed to help the other teachers, which is resulting in a lot of frustration.

¹ Charlie Naylor expressed his apprehension about the upcoming results.

Very capable Educational Assistants/ Teacher Assistants are often more knowledgeable about issues of inclusion and disability than regular teachers. Where this is the case, regular teachers tend to take the back seat in terms of responsibility for teaching students with special needs.

Concerning people doing session work at UBC, there is no real consistency. The courses depend on who's teaching and the overall approach is very haphazard.

There are no students with special needs in French Immersion in BC.

C. Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, approaches to inclusion depend on the particular community and system; there is no consistency. Some students are fully included, many are partially included and many are completely segregated. While the Saskatoon Catholic Board is a leader in inclusion, the Public Board is not.

The Department of Learning is requiring implementation of Schools Plus, i.e., schools are to support health, social justice, social service and other needs. This involves educators working with other service providers. The Department has good statements about inclusion, but implementation is inconsistent. There are School and Division Improvement initiatives. Again, however, these plans do not consistently place a focus on diversity/ inclusion.

More than 50% of First Nations/Aboriginal students have some form of special educational need. Issues of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome are major.

There is no consistent philosophical support for inclusion. It tends to be framed as a "choice". Parents run up against barriers to good partnerships with teachers (i.e., parents tend to have a "teachers know best" attitude).

Special educators by law must have qualifications. The University of Saskatchewan has post-graduate and 5th year certificate programs. The Department of Education specifies content and the university adjudicates. One needs a regular Bachelor of Education plus the fifth year for Special Education certification. In regular education there is one required class on diversity, but it's just general knowledge.

There is a need to build focus on diversity on all teacher education courses.

Regular education teachers may get good practicum experience, or poor, depending on where the practicum takes place.

There is a need for in-service training, including strategies and processes for specific needs/disabilities. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) has done some good work in this area. Saskatchewan Learning provides some professional development.

However, teachers don't attend what they need to because they don't have enough professional development days.

As inclusive education moves forward, there is an increase in the number of para-educators. There is a need for pre- and in-service training for these people because . para-educators are doing most of the teaching of students with disabilities. While the law requires that people who are qualified in special education do the teaching, para-educators aren't required to take courses and often don't have enough days away from job for professional development. Classroom teachers aren't receiving much pre- or in-service training on how to work with para-educators. Some parents indicated that kids with disabilities were doing better when teacher assistants were on strike.

Teachers want and use practical resources from the SACL library.

The first Summer Institute on inclusive education will take place this year at the University of Saskatchewan.

D. Alberta

In Alberta, piling course on course hasn't done much to ensure that people have the knowledge needed for actual use. The University of Calgary has worked to build a program that integrates experience in the field and academic knowledge. It is intended that graduates will be able to work with a variety of professionals, know what they're doing and why. A challenge has been to ensure good quality field experience.

Not much attention is being paid to special education at the secondary level. Teacher candidates are not getting much exposure to students with special needs.

School Boards tend to throw the weakest teachers at weakest students. Practicums are not preparing teachers well for what they will experience when they get hired. In-service training may be the place to focus instead of piling more material into pre-service training. The Alberta Teachers' Association has developed some useful resources.

Graduate students who are now teaching are saying that the coding system _ a long list of numbers for coding children according to a range of cognitive, social, physical and social problems _ takes a lot of time. Provincial funding is attached to coded kids, so there are incentives for schools to code lots of kids. The children are by and large included in regular classes. However, teachers think about the children, evaluate and report to parents in terms of the coding.

The notion of inclusion has been accepted but not liked by regular teachers and there is growing resistance. Teachers are feeling abandoned _ they are expected to individualize programs and address a wide range of needs.

At the University of Alberta, all students are required to take a general course on special needs, which has bits of information on inclusion. Athabasca offers a Masters Degree in Inclusive Education. Campus Alberta sponsors Campus Alberta Inclusive Special Education Initiative (CAISEI), in which representatives from 4 universities, the provincial ACL and others are exploring cross-university initiatives in inclusion, including graduate and under graduate certificates, a Masters Degree and on-line courses.

AACL co-sponsors a Summer Institute on Inclusive Education and provides bursaries.

The Alberta Teachers' Association has developed in-service training on inclusive education. It is not clear how widely the training is delivered, however.

Alberta Learning has policy that the neighbourhood school is the first placement for the student, but the policy plays out differently across province. The Commission on Learning's survey, consultations and booklet indicated that diversity in the classroom is a problem. People know it is the "right thing to do" and attitudes are supportive, but there is difficulty in actually doing this in the regular classroom.

Various recommendations are being operationalized and the coding process is being reviewed.

The Special Education Council of the Teachers' Association is adding resources to ATA library.

There are contradictions in approaches to inclusion from community to community, from junior to senior high school, etc. High school teachers aren't aware that people with significant cognitive difficulties are moving on to college and university.

People with intellectual disabilities are not usually an issue until government limits funding and this substantially impacts, e.g., leads to collective bargaining on class size. Inclusive education garners profile when it's a problem, not when it's a solution.

There is a need to secure sufficient funding and other resources for more and better teacher preparation.

Family alignment with home and school associations and the ATA is problematic on a number of fronts; there is a need to approach government with a common voice.

The Special Education Council of the ATA is prominent, but not as a leader on inclusion.

An Aboriginal student with special needs faces much less likelihood of inclusion (and even of finishing school) than other students. Concerning the early high school leaving group (i.e., "drop outs") _ where are they? There is a need to deal with these issues of exclusion.

It is highly problematic trying to advance inclusive education in the systemic context of special education.

E. Summary

1. Issues at the teacher level

- Teachers have spotty, superficial background through pre-service and further training on issues of inclusion. There is a need to identify specific knowledge/skills that are required but not in place, and the children who are losing out in the process.
- Teachers are feeling overwhelmed dealing with diversity in the classroom without adequate supports.
- There is insufficient contact (pre and in-service) between educators and kids with disabilities in positive, inclusive situations.
- Philosophical committed to (or passive acceptance of) inclusion is beginning to wane because teachers are feeling overburdened, stranded and increasingly resentful.
- There are no guarantees that teacher assistants / paraprofessionals will have adequate background on issues of inclusion.
- There is a need for teachers to know how to work collaboratively with teacher assistants so the latter don't end up being the main educators of children with disabilities.

2. Issues at the system and ideological level

- Doing inclusive education is problematic in a special education policy and philosophical context.
- Inclusive education programming is considered an "add on" and is therefore vulnerable in university and school systems.
- Inclusion not an issue until it's a problem; it is not perceived as driving solutions to a range of challenges/problems in education.
- There are perverse incentives for schools to code/label students, and associated administrative burdens for teachers.

- There are insufficient professional development days, insufficient resources for professional development and insufficient incentives/requirements, for educators to pursue pre-service training and upgrading on issues of inclusion/diversity.
- There is fragmentation of advocacy efforts across families, school and family associations, and teacher federations.
- There are radically inconsistent approaches across systems (public, Catholic); districts/ communities; elementary, junior and high school and students with disabilities are being filtered from French Immersion

II. Measures to foster more effective inclusive practice in the regular classroom

The following are summary points that were generated in conversations among participants.

A. Measures at the teacher level

The following are needed:

- More in the way of iterative university-based and practicum-based work.
- Flexibility for teachers, with mentorships at the school, district and provincial levels, available on an as-needed basis. E.g., offer 20 teachers who are doing good things with children to be part of the mentoring process.
- Action research for teachers to individually identify their personal knowledge gaps (teachers can identify their own questions that they want answered).
- Information about and modelling on working with and supervising paraprofessionals (roles and responsibilities concerning inclusion).
- Broad implementation of support teams. Teachers can't be expected to know everything.
- Specific knowledge/skills, including skills for collaboration, communication, positive behavioural support and approaches to addressing dual needs (e.g., ESL/ Aboriginal, Low SES and special needs).
- Much more background and skills development on differentiated instruction.

B. Measures at the policy and systems level

The following are needed:

- Broader sharing of successes and linking of good practices (lots of good things happening).
- Measures to bring parents together to talk with teacher federations and school trustees about their children.
- Creation of standards and benchmarks for good inclusive education.
- Creation of a human resources development strategy to elicit and keep good teachers.
- Implementation of a multi-point learning model for educating educators across the working years.
- Clear expectations of, and accountability for ensuring, inclusion in education. Accountability needs to be operative at all levels (e.g., district/provincial), not just on individual teachers and schools.
- Arrangements to free teachers for more professional development.
- Limits on class size.
- Strategies and processes for building certain types of expertise in supporting students with mild/subtle disabilities and students with very significant disabilities (cognitive, autism, mental health).
- Research that documents:
 - what is happening in terms of inclusive practice and the potential implications (inclusion looks very different from school to school)
 - whether pilot projects are effective or not, and, if so, how so and why?
- Given that curriculum is politically made, there is a need for a set of "rabid" inclusive instructors and curriculum developers to push the educational administration system.
- Measures to include parents in teacher education, e.g., creation of partnerships between CACL, provincial ACLs, Roehrer, families and students to sit down with teachers and talk about children with disabilities.
- Arrangements to put parents at the heart of education _ to level the playing field with teachers in terms of the knowledge and expertise that they bring to the educational process.

- "How to meet the needs of kids in your class" as part of teacher preparation for math, science, language arts and social studies instruction. There is a need to infuse strategies for inclusion across the curriculum.
- Assessment procedures modified across the curriculum.
- Teacher preparation that focuses on problem solving and that helps to create a culture in which the teacher will be a good problem solver.
- Conditions created at the school level for making possible differentiated instruction.

1. Considerations for pre-service training

- Pre-service training would:
 - be delivered at universities
 - be developed by the universities and provincial Ministries of Education
 - involve, in the design, consultations with teacher associations
 - address the demographic shift in terms of new people who are teaching
- Deans of Education understand inclusive education as including Aboriginal and ESL students. Ministries of Education will weigh in on issues of inclusion and disability and will indicate to Deans that various issues have to be addressed. The Western Deans of Education is a group that comprises a potential point of intervention, as are individual Deans of Education at the provincial level.²
- Partnerships with teacher federations, universities, school districts, and NGOs are worth exploring. E.g., the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has done proactive work on diversity in the classroom and would probably be quite supportive of joint work with ACLs on inclusion.

2. Considerations for in-service training

- In-service training could be university-based (classroom and distance education), or sponsored/delivered by individual schools, school districts, ACLs, teacher federations and School Superintendents.
- Lots of teachers would take advantage of learning opportunities if they were available at the right time to meet a need. May and June is when planning is being done for next year. The middle of May, the middle of June and September are the windows for targeting teachers seeking upgrading. Around July 2nd is a good time to conduct an event so it doesn't infringe on vacations.

² John Wiens at the University of Manitoba may be able to provide guidance as to how to approach the Deans.

- Alberta Learning can provide province-wide support. However, "Tell Us to Learn" provides canned lesson plans. Teachers are looking for new resources. A resource for building access to teacher supports for inclusive education would be a good idea.
- Alberta Learning has committed to having Internet access for every student in the province. An advantage of the Internet is that it makes it easy for like-minded people to communicate with one another (chat rooms, etc.).
- Video conferencing has the potential to reach a lot of people in a lot of different areas.
- Online video clips would help teachers see the strategies in action.
- Adapting teaching units is an ongoing challenge. Availability of these units online would be a real help, especially for younger teachers.
- There is a need to develop critical evaluation of whether online resources are really going to be helpful. Building a reputation as a trustworthy vetter of resources would be a good strategy.
- Materials have to be in "teacher language" or they won't be accessible. They have to be geared to an applied level of discussion, not highly technical.

III. Engaging partners to move forward an inclusive education agenda

A. Who to engage

- Trustees
- Teacher federations/societies
- School divisions
- School superintendents
- Departments of learning
- Universities (Deans of Education and individual faculty members)
- Teachers in training

- Classroom teachers and special educators who are already committed to furthering inclusion
- Families
- Advocacy groups
- Students/youth
- Clinician groups (psychologists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists)
- The community at large
- Inclusive education should be on the agenda of the Canada Learning Institute because it amounts to good educational practice.³

B. How to engage partners

- Consider shifting the discussion from "inclusive education" to "effective educational practice" that benefits everyone. E.g., the OECD has evidence on the ten most effective educational practices. We should be talking about effective, evidence-based practice.
- Marshall and communicate the evidence that the educational elements that are consistent with good inclusive practice (e.g., the pedagogy, school culture, work process, administrative measures) actually do benefit everyone.
- Find places of common ground with needed allies. Work towards commonly shared goals, negotiating reciprocity in the process (give and take). E.g., school-home dialogue on strategies that both parents and teachers can pursue together to further the education of children with disabilities, such as advocating for a more inclusive system and working towards better programmatic support for inclusive practices. Parents and teachers could co-deliver courses on communicative strategies, pedagogical approaches, etc.
- Understand the flash points that are likely to aggravate tensions/divisions and slow progress in working with potential allies. E.g., *requiring* that educators take courses/upgrading on inclusion may be less effective than instituting measures for *encouraging, providing incentives and rewards* to educators for doing the same.

³ Ben Levin, who was Deputy Minister of Education in Manitoba and Dean of Education at the University of Manitoba, is now one of co-chairs of the Canada Learning Institute.

- Help to link allies together (e.g., universities, students in faculties of education, parents, NGOs) for common discussions. For instance:
 - Support universities that place some focus on inclusive practice and on linking to people and organizations in the community _ i.e., on engaging people in relationships around an inclusion agenda.
 - Work towards having a non-teaching practicum component incorporated in teacher preparation, where teachers in training would have direct experience and dialogue with provincial NGOs that are involved with people with disabilities and their families.
- Press for the kinds of professional development opportunities that are needed and ensure that teachers are encouraged and supported to take part in those opportunities.
- Recognize the limits of what a given ally can do and deliver.
- Identify "what's in it" for the other partner to engage in the collaborative process.
- Ensure political strategies for collaboration with partners are well-grounded and practical, taking into account real personalities' interests and strengths.